Group Career Construction Counseling: A Mixed-Methods Intervention Study With High School Students

Jacobus Gideon Maree

This study investigated the value of group career construction counseling in a high school context. The author used purposive sampling to select participants who had sought career counseling. A mixed-methods intervention study design was also used. Participants (N = 57) completed the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale–South Africa (CAAS-SA) before the 1st and after the 2nd intervention. The Career Interest Profile and the Maree Career Matrix were used to facilitate the intervention, and the CAAS-SA was used to test the research hypotheses. The findings revealed that the boys' and the girls' career adaptability had improved meaningfully on all of the CAAS-SA subscales. No gender-based differences were found. However, differences were detected between both the boys' and the girls' pre- and posttest Control and Confidence subscale scores. The findings demonstrate the value of career construction counseling in group settings. More longitudinal research with diverse participants is needed.

Keywords: group career construction counseling, mixed-methods intervention study, integrated qualitative–quantitative approach, Career Interest Profile, Maree Career Matrix

Challenges posed by changes in the world of work (Maree, in press) have stressed the need for new approaches to career counseling around the world to deal with increasing unemployment and underemployment (Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta, 2017; International Labour Organization, 2017). According to Chiaradonna (2017), the biggest challenges facing workers today are the need to become and remain employable instead of merely finding suitable employment, the ability to blend work and life roles, and the willingness to embark on career journeys that will lead to lifelong personal growth and enhanced self-awareness. The impact of these challenges underscores the need for career counseling at all levels to prepare people for the world of work. Helping students decide on a field of study after having finished school is particularly important. Doyle (2017) argued that frequent moves from one job to another make it difficult to maintain balance in one's work life, and this is compounded by the fact that competencies and abilities that once were sought after have now become obsolete and redundant.

In many parts of the world, traditional career assessment, which is based on test results and the recommendation of a few fields of study by an "expert" career counselor, is still the order of the day. However, over the past 3 decades or so, newer approaches have started to gain traction in

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developing countries. More specifically, qualitative or storied approaches in addition to quantitative methods have received much attention and are being implemented (Hartung & Santilli, 2018). A thread running through these approaches is the importance of helping people identify central life themes, which can be used to help them identify appropriate careers that can incorporate these themes in their career lives.

The present study examines the usefulness of career counseling at the end of students' high school careers as a means of enhancing their career adaptability, career resilience, employability, and chances of finding sustainable decent work (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017). The emphasis is on devising a career counseling approach that not only takes into account the fluidity of the current job market but also considers people's career-life identities. Such an approach could help foster innovative thinking in career counseling theory and practice and encourage the examination of different work selves or career selves (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006; Savickas, 2011a). I adopted life design counseling, which is premised largely on principles of career construction (Savickas, 2005, 2011a, 2015a, 2015b) and self-construction (Guichard, 2009), as the framework for the present study (Savickas, 2015a, 2015b). This approach promotes critical self-reflection, reflexivity, positive change, and forward movement (Hartung, 2013; Maree, 2013; Savickas, 2016).

Career Construction

Career construction counseling helps people draw on their own career-life stories, or autobiographies, to shape their careers (Savickas, 2001, 2005). Career construction counseling crystallizes in dynamic, action-orientated career interventions during which past memories are revisited, reframed, and reinterpreted in the context of present career concerns. Past, sometimes painful, memories are transformed in a way that inspires action—past experiences are converted into future inspiration and affirmative aspirations. By eliciting people's career-life stories and helping them listen to and hear themselves and relive these stories, counselors enable them to connect with their past and identify their central life themes. In other words, an "autobiographical bridge" is constructed between people's past, their present, and their future—one that facilitates construction, deconstruction, reconstruction, and coconstruction of their sense of self and identity and prepares them for any future transitions in their personal and career lives (Savickas, 2011a, 2011b).

Self-Construction

Guichard's (2005) self-construction theory is closely aligned with career construction counseling and its intervention dynamics. Self-construction theory also holds that narrating stories of key career-life experiences and linking those stories to feasible future career-life projects enables people to (re)construct their often extremely fluid career-life identities. The aim is to help people achieve a more fluid, cohesive, and authentic sense of career-life identity that will help them make meaning of and find purpose in their career lives. Such stable senses of self are evidenced in explicit and implicit responses to questions such as "Who am I?" "Where am I?" "Where am I going?" "Why do I work?" and "What meaning does my life have?" (Guichard, 2005).

Career Adaptability

Del Corso (2013), Hartung (2015), and Savickas (2015b) related career adaptability to recurring choice making, transitions, and dealing with work-related traumas in uncertain and fluid occupational environments. According to Hartung (2015) and Savickas (2005, 2015a), each of the four Cs of career adaptability (i.e., concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) can be associated with idiosyncratic questions as well as certain beliefs and attitudes. Concern is associated with the question, "Do I have a future?" It denotes awareness of, involvement in, and active preparation for one's future. Control is associated with the question, "Who owns my future?" and can be seen in the extent to which people connect with and exercise control over their future. Curiosity is associated with the question, "What do I want to do with my future?" This aspect of career adaptability can be seen in the way people obtain self-knowledge and career-related information in order to enter (fit into) the occupational world. Finally, confidence is associated with the question, "Can I do it?" and can be seen in the extent to which people display the level of self-efficacy required to deal with perceived and real difficulties in achieving career goals.

Group-Based Career Counseling Interventions

The usefulness of traditional group career counseling has also been demonstrated and confirmed by many researchers and practitioners, including Mair (1989), who stressed the inherent value of sharing one's stories with others in group-based formats. Kuijpers, Meijers, and Gundy (2011) underscored the power of dialogical interaction to enhance students' reflexivity. This also applies to the potential of group discussions to enhance career decision-making and adaptability. Likewise, Hayes (2001) confirmed the value of group career counseling for school learners because it provides them with a space that facilitates expression of their concerns, feelings, and opinions and also enables them to manage their career concerns and expedite their self- and career construction.

The intervention used in the present study was based on several principles, including those advocated by Santos (2004), which were adapted for the purposes of the present research. First, all communication should occur on the basis of unconditional acceptance and in an empathic, respectful, nonconfrontational, and well-organized manner. Second, counselors should assume the role of mediators, encouragers of dialogue and discussion, and collaborators—not experts on participants. Third, counselors should elicit participants' career-life stories and promote the construction of autobiographical bridges between their past, present, and future. Fourth, counselors should advance participants' capacity to examine situations in an emotionally and socially intelligent manner. Finally, it is important to establish the ground rules for group career counseling at the outset. This was all done in the intervention discussed here.

Integrated Assessment of Group Career Counseling Efficacy

Inventory scores and personal stories should be used as part of a comprehensive assessment and counseling intervention to check for the constancy of the

themes identified (Hartung, 2010). Although a dire need exists for research on the effect of group career counseling in general (Whiston, Li, Mitts, & Wright, 2017), conducting research on the value of group career counseling interventions for career construction using an integrated qualitative–quantitative approach in particular is indicated (Hartung, 2010). It is particularly important to devise and implement assessment instruments that can be used to facilitate this approach so as to accentuate the passage from using test scores in isolation to using and blending scores and stories (McMahon & Patton, 2002). An aim of career construction counseling is to empower clients to recount their autobiographies in a way that allows the counselor and client alike to listen to (construct), "uncode" or unpack (deconstruct), and clarify or revise (reconstruct) these stories jointly (coconstruct) so that renewed hope and encouragement can be engendered in clients (Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012; Savickas, 2011a).

Purpose of the Study

Few studies have examined group career construction counseling (Di Fabio & Maree, 2012, 2013; van der Horst & Klehe, 2018; Whiston et al., 2017). Theories abound on group career counseling, but little actual research and reporting on the subject have been done. This is a serious lacuna, especially in view of the shortage of trained career counselors, particularly in developing countries. The need to examine the value of group-based counseling for career construction in particular is great. Therefore, this study investigated the value of integrated qualitative–quantitative group career construction counseling in an independent school context. It was hypothesized that integrated qualitative–quantitative group career construction counseling in an independent school context would (a) influence the career adaptability of the participants and (b) result in elevated postintervention scores in the four domains of career adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence), as well as in the total career adaptability scores.

Method

Participants

Participants (28 boys, 29 girls) attended an independent school in Mbombela, South Africa. They were predominantly from higher income families ($n = 52$, 91.2%), with a small number from lower income families ($n = 5$, 8.8%). Elements of both convenience and purposive sampling were used in the study. Grade 11 students in the school where the research was conducted are annually afforded the opportunity to receive group career counseling. Of the 57 students who chose to participate in the study, 45 identified as White (78.9%) and 12 identified as Black (21.1%). The mean age of the boys was 17.20 years ($SD = 0.44$), and the mean age of the girls was 17.03 years ($SD = 0.39$). The purpose of the assessment was explained to the participants and their parents, and informed consent was obtained. Our respective roles and rights in the intervention were also clarified. In accordance with standard procedures, counseling services were provided to any participants who needed them.

Measures

Career-life themes. I used the Career Interest Profile (CIP, Version 6; Maree, 2017a) to gather qualitative career-related information. Grounded

in career construction theory (Savickas, 2011a, 2011b), the CIP consists of four purposefully structured parts: (a) biographical details, family influences, and work-related information; (b) five most and least preferred career preferences; (c) six career choice questions; and (d) 15 career-life story narrative questions. Each part is designed to help high school students and young adults identify their central career-life themes; their main career-related interests, issues, and concerns; and their inner advice as to how they can turn issues and concerns into hope and action that can advance their individual life projects. The CIP has shown itself to be an effective career counseling instrument (Maree, 2017a). Participants were also asked to write and bring along an autobiographical story titled "My Life Story" on the 1st assessment day.

Vocational interests and confidence. The Maree Career Matrix (MCM; Maree, 2017b) was developed in South Africa and is based on (a) trait and factor theory, (b) developmental theory, and (c) social learning theory embedded in social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). The MCM measures vocational interests and self-estimates of confidence to follow certain careers. The MCM consists of a list of 152 occupations fitting one of 19 categories with eight careers in each category. The psychometric properties of the MCM are considered excellent (Maree & Taylor, 2016), with evidence of good reliability and validity. Rasch analysis indicated that the items in the MCM interest scales all measured a single construct. All of the categories had reliability coefficients above .70. The test–retest reliability coefficients for career interests and self-estimates of confidence about aptitude were above .70 for all of the MCM categories.

Career adaptability. The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale–South Africa (CAAS-SA; Maree, 2012) was used to measure career adaptability. The CAAS-SA consists of four subscales and 24 items (six items per subscale) that measure concern, control, curiosity, and confidence as psychosocial resources for managing transitions, mastering developmental tasks, and working through work traumas. The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) originated from international collaboration among 13 countries and has demonstrated exceptional reliability, as well as adequate cross-national measurement equivalence (Maree, 2012).

Research Design

I used a mixed-methods intervention study design. Likewise, I conducted a mixed-methods intervention with the implementation of a qualitative–quantitative design, in which qualitative and quantitative data were gathered simultaneously. The CIP and the MCM were used to facilitate the intervention and assess its usefulness. The CAAS-SA was used to test the research hypotheses.

Data Analysis

All data collection occurred simultaneously. The qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed independently and later related and blended. I performed repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to compare the mean pre- and posttest scores of the four CAAS-SA constructs by gender. Although the repeated measures ANOVAs showed that gender was not a significant factor when comparing the mean pre- and posttest scores, I calculated paired-samples *t* tests to establish

whether there were statistically significant and practically meaningful differences between (a) mean pre- and posttest CAAS-SA scores for the total group and (b) the boys' and girls' mean pre- and posttest CAAS-SA scores. Cohen's (1988) *d* values were calculated to assess the practical significance of the differences between the pre- and posttest scores.

The second session ended by asking participants to respond to the following prompts: (a) "How did you experience the sessions? Please explain your answer"; (b) "What changes occurred during the intervention?"; (c) "What effected these changes?"; and (d) "You also need to know the following about me" (this item prompted participants to write down their views, thoughts, and feelings). I used an inductive–deductive data analysis method to analyze the participants' reflections. I began by drawing on themes that I had expected to find (namely, the four CAAS-SA constructs as predetermined, a priori themes). Throughout the analysis, I looked for novel themes and subthemes that had not been anticipated at the commencement of the study. An adapted form of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was used to support analysis of the data. I began by transcribing, reading, and rereading the data. Next, I generated tentative codes and reduced the content themes in the collected data to fewer themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Then, the codes were organized into themes and subthemes and were reviewed. Themes and subthemes were labeled, and finally, the data were assembled in one place corresponding to the identified themes and subthemes. I also created a word cloud from the participants' reflections to assist me in my analysis.

Researcher Biases

Against my background as a professional psychologist with extensive career counseling experience, I strongly believe in the power and value of the approach to career counseling that I am advocating. Moreover, I firmly believe that the associated intervention can be used to advance people's sense of purpose and meaning making. More specifically, I believe in the particular value of an integrated qualitative–quantitative approach to career counseling in individual and group career construction counseling contexts.

Rigor of the Study

Participants were repeatedly requested to reflect on and write about how they experienced the sessions. To increase trustworthiness and credibility of the process, I acquired the assistance of an external coder who held a doctorate in educational psychology and experience in qualitative and quantitative career counseling. To avoid any misunderstanding, I gave participants feedback after each phase of the research. Interpretations of the data were discussed and verified with them. I kept participants abreast of the research at all stages to facilitate verification of the findings and avoid misinterpretation of their responses.

Group-Based Intervention

The strategy I implemented was based on career construction counseling (Savickas, 2011a). The first intervention took place over a full 8-hour day with a number of breaks in between. Different subgroups (four

participants per subgroup, with one subgroup consisting of five members) were first constituted. Participants were given the opportunity to decide which subgroup they wanted to join (Maree, Cook, & Fletcher, 2018). On Day 1, the nature and aim of the assessment, the procedures to be followed, the assessment instruments, and so on were explained. Participants began by completing the CAAS-SA, the CIP, and then the MCM. After the assessment, I used an integrated career choice and construction conversation template to help participants capture their values, themes, and interest patterns. They were then requested to return home and reflect on the content of the integrated document. At the end of the assessment, participants were asked to reflect on and write about how they had experienced the sessions.

In the next intervention (3 consecutive days, 4 weeks later), each group was given approximately 1.5 hours to reflect on their career stories and scores in their groups. The participants and I discussed and integrated their MCM and CIP outcomes. This included completion of their identity statements (Savickas, 2011a). Individual participants reflected on their outcomes in their groups while the other group members (the audience) reflected on prompts by me and the participant (counselee) without addressing the counselee directly. At the same time, they self-reflected on my questions to the counselee. The counselees were also asked what they believed that they could do to address their identified areas for growth, what messages they took from their favorite quotations, and why they regarded certain episodes/events as their biggest successes or failures to help them draw on their inner advice to themselves to advance their self-awareness, clarify their career identities, choose careers, and clarify their unique career-life projects (Di Fabio & Maree, 2012, 2013).

Next, the focus shifted to reflections on how the counselees could convert challenges experienced in their early lives (e.g., never having been good enough in the eyes of others) into themes of hope and of inspiration (Hartung & Vess, 2016). Together, we connected the counselees' career-life themes and finalized their career choice recommendations. In addition, other psychoeducational information was provided (e.g., time management strategies). All participants were then urged to conduct a thorough job analysis, make an attempt to address the psychosocial and psychoeducational issues we had highlighted together, and report back to me at regular intervals. After the CAAS-SA had been administered for a second time, participants were again requested to reflect on and write about how they had experienced the sessions.

Results

Results of the ANOVAs are summarized in Table 1. In general, the intervention appeared to have been successful, as can be seen from the results presented in Tables 2 and 3. For the total group, the mean pretest–posttest CAAS-SA total score, as well as all subscale scores, increased significantly. In addition, both boys' and girls' CAAS-SA total scores, as well as their Concern subscale scores, were practically significant and showed great improvement. The boys' Control and Curiosity subscale scores showed evidence of medium improvement, whereas only the girls' Curiosity subscale scores showed moderate improvement.

TABLE 1

Results of the Repeated Measures Analyses of Variance

Variable	Effect	p
Concern		
Within-subjects effects	Pretest–posttest	<.001
	Concern × Gender	.445
Between-subject effects	Gender	.715
Control		
Within-subjects effects	Pretest–posttest	<.001
	Control × Gender	.170
Between-subject effects	Gender	.178
Curiosity		
Within-subjects effects	Pretest–posttest	<.001
	Curiosity × Gender	.812
Between-subject effects	Gender	.661
Confidence		
Within-subjects effects	Pretest–posttest	.005
	Confidence × Gender	.937
Between-subject effects	Gender	.909

Deductively and inductively derived themes and subthemes appear in Table 4. The themes and their subthemes are corroborated by extracts from the participants' reflections. Deductively derived themes comprised four subthemes: (a) career concern (e.g., "I have more direction and options to investigate and plan a choice that will suit me"), (b) career control (e.g., "I feel more at ease now. I know which direction I am heading in after years of hesitating"), (c) career curiosity (e.g., "I am surprised and eager to find out more about my future possibilities"), and (d) career confidence (e.g., "The sessions made me feel confident in what I want to do as a career"; "Informative! I feel more sure, in control—not only about my career").

Five inductively derived themes emerged from the analysis; three of these themes contained subthemes. The first theme, self-reflection (taking a step back and contemplating one's earlier thoughts and actions), included four subthemes: (a) narratability, or the ability to articulate one's deepest needs and feelings (e.g., "Thinking and talking about many things I never get to talk about has made me understand myself and what I want to do better)"; (b) autobiographicity, or the ability to use

TABLE 2

Mean Pretest–Posttest Scores and Paired-Samples
t-Test Results for the Total Group

Variable	M	t	p	Cohen's d
Concern	−0.59	−8.09	.001**	1.08
Control	−0.25	−3.95	.001**	0.53
Curiosity	−0.28	−3.78	.001**	0.50
Confidence	−0.22	−2.99	.004**	0.40
CAAS-SA total	−0.33	−6.81	.001**	0.91

Note. The mean pretest score for each variable was 0. Effect sizes were defined as small ($d = 0.20$), medium ($d = 0.50$), and large ($d = 0.80$; Cohen, 1988). CAAS-SA total = Career Adapt-Abilities Scale–South Africa total score.
**$p < .01$.

TABLE 3

Mean Pretest–Posttest Scores and Paired-Samples
t-Test Results by Gender

Variable	*M*	*t*	*df*	*p*	Cohen's *d*
Boys					
Concern	−0.51	−5.41	26	.001**	1.04
Control	−0.31	−3.95	26	.001**	0.76
Curiosity	−0.27	−2.77	26	.01**	0.53
Confidence	−0.19	−1.75	26	.046*	0.34
CAAS-SA total	−0.32	−4.93	26	.001**	0.95
Girls					
Concern	−0.67	−6.07	28	.001**	1.13
Control	−0.18	−1.93	28	.03*	0.36
Curiosity	−0.29	−2.59	28	.01**	0.48
Confidence	−0.25	−2.45	28	.016*	0.46
CAAS-SA total	−0.35	−4.69	28	.001**	0.87

Note. The mean pretest score for each variable was 0. Effect sizes were defined as small ($d = 0.20$), medium ($d = 0.50$), and large ($d = 0.80$; Cohen, 1988). CAAS-SA total = Career Adapt-Abilities Scale–South Africa total score.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

one's own story (e.g., "Interacting and thinking about my story helped me discover amazing life patterns"); (c) awareness of psychoeducational resources (e.g., "This course alerted me to more sources to look into that can help me"); and (d) awareness of psychosocial resources (e.g., "This session helped me look at my future and what skills I have and I need in the future").

The second theme, reflexivity (drawing on reflections to plan for the future), included two subthemes: (a) future perspective, or the shift in emphasis from focusing on the past to considering new activities (e.g., "I realize I need not fear—just take the initiative to learn more"; "I need

TABLE 4

Themes and Subthemes Identified Through Thematic Analysis

Theme and Subtheme
A. Deductively derived themes
Subtheme 1: Career concern
Subtheme 2: Career control
Subtheme 3: Career curiosity
Subtheme 4: Career confidence
B. Inductively derived themes and subthemes
1. Self-reflection
Subtheme 1: Narratability
Subtheme 2: Autobiographicity
Subtheme 3: Awareness of psychoeducational resources
Subtheme 4: Awareness of psychosocial resources
2. Reflexivity
Subtheme 1: Future perspective
Subtheme 2: Self-discovery
3. Action orientation
4. Enhanced self-awareness
Subtheme 1: Identity formation
Subtheme 2: Insight
5. Appreciation

to find out more about some things"), and (b) self-discovery, or the process of uncovering hitherto hidden facets of oneself (e.g., "Helped to confirm choices I had made and alerted me to things about myself that I hadn't properly considered").

The third theme involved action orientation, or the willingness and readiness to take the steps needed to plan for the future (e.g., "This session showed me what to do to clarify my future career direction"). The fourth theme, enhanced self-awareness (increased sense of one's capacities and possibilities), included two subthemes: (a) identity formation, or the process of strengthening one's self-awareness and discovering new insights (e.g., "I got insight into myself and where I am heading"), and (b) insight, or the process of understanding oneself better (e.g.,"I now know myself better. Never had a Plan B—now have many other options to look at"). The final theme was labeled appreciation (e.g., "The intervention opened my eyes about new things").

Five months after the second session, the participants were again asked to provide feedback. Forty-eight of the participants (84.2%) reported having achieved greater clarity about their choice of a field of study and associated careers and said that they had found the intervention helpful and useful. The participants who were still undecided were encouraged to schedule a follow-up meeting with me to discuss their indecision.

Discussion

This study investigated the value of group career construction counseling using the CIP and MCM. A key study goal was to determine whether the intervention would be associated with increased career adaptability among high school–aged youth. The study also examined whether there would be a strong positive association between qualitative and quantitative data outcomes.

Career adaptability refers to psychosocial strengths for managing present and future career tasks and transitions (Savickas, 2013). Statistically significant elevated postintervention scores (and also practically meaningful differences) between the total group's pre- and posttest scores on the CAAS-SA, as well as for the four subscales of the measure, bode well for the participants' future. Generally speaking, the present findings confirm previous findings that group career construction counseling can be used effectively in group contexts (Di Fabio & Maree, 2013; Rehfuss & Di Fabio, 2012; Savickas, 2005). The changes refer to an enhanced ability to deal with career-related transitions, such as leaving school at the conclusion of secondary education, choosing a field of study, and eventually embarking on a unique career journey in the current fluid and turbulent occupational world (Guichard, 2009; Savickas, 2005, 2011a). The findings echo those of Gati, Krausz, and Osipow (1996) and Whiston (2008), who highlighted the effectiveness of group-based career counseling using a traditional approach.

The largest effect size was found for the pre- and posttest difference in career concern. This finding may indicate that the intervention was particularly useful in promoting the participants' ability to approach their future with a renewed sense of hope and optimism, enhancing the participants' ability and willingness to set goals and do thorough

job/work analysis, and helping them plan more appropriately for their future (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017).

No statistically significant gender differences in career adaptability scores were found. However, statistically significant as well as practically meaningful differences were found in the case of both boys and girls between the pre- and postintervention scores in the CAAS-SA total score and all of its subscales. None of the gender differences were significant; yet, closer inspection of the results yielded interesting information. In the case of the CAAS-SA total score and the Concern subscale score, the effect sizes were large for both the boys (ds = 0.95 and 1.04, respectively) and the girls (ds = 0.87 and 1.13, respectively). Clearly, the intervention strengthened their overall career adaptability and, particularly, the belief that they had a future that was worth planning and working hard for.

With respect to control, the effect size for the boys was medium (d = 0.76), whereas that for the girls was small (d = 0.36). The discrepancy may be because the assessment took place in a predominantly rural area where the situation of women has not improved as much as it has in urban areas. Consequently, the female participants may have demonstrated a lesser degree of assertive behavior, autonomy, and self-regulation regarding career decision-making and may have been afforded less opportunity to take ownership of their future compared with the male participants.

In contrast, the effect size for confidence among the boys was small (d = 0.34), whereas that for the girls was small to medium (d = 0.46). The girls may have benefited more than the boys from the intervention in terms of career confidence because the intervention purposefully aimed at promoting the career development of both girls and boys. I took trouble to emphasize the equality of boys and girls and the fact that many fields of study that were not open to women previously are open to them today. The intervention improved the girls' belief that they were capable of enrolling in (Del Corso, 2013), for example, fields of study to qualify as electricians and engineers, generally perceived to be the preserve of men in the research region.

Given that "developing adapt-abilities . . . entails forming distinct attitudes, beliefs, and competencies related to career planning, choice, and adjustment" (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017, p. 23), it seems fair to assume that the intervention was successful. This view is confirmed by Ginevra, Pallini, Vecchio, Nota, and Soresi (2016), who contended that career adaptability enhances future time perspective and predicts career decidedness.

Consistent with the quantitative findings, the deductive analysis confirmed that, generally speaking, participants exhibited satisfactory levels of career-related concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. The themes and subthemes that emerged inductively indicated that the intervention had enabled the participants to take a step back and reflect critically on themselves. In line with previous research (Bangali & Guichard, 2012; Guichard, 2009; Kuijpers et al., 2011; Savickas, 2005; Schultheiss, Watts, Sterland, & O'Neill, 2011), the participants in this study were enabled to articulate their deepest needs and feelings and advance their career-life stories. They were also alerted to the importance of drawing on their idiosyncratic psychoeducational as well as psychosocial resources (Del Corso & Briddick, 2015; Maree & Symington, 2015). The participants

gave evidence of having been empowered to draw on their own reflections to discover strengths and areas for growth that might help them plan for a brighter future instead of fixating on the past. Their enhanced self-awareness went hand in hand with the strengthening of their sense of self or identity and increased self-understanding (McAdams, 2013). Finally, they confirmed that they had found the intervention useful and helpful and expressed their appreciation for the novelty of the strategy and the enjoyment they had derived from the process.

These positive outcomes can be ascribed to several factors. First, the integrated approach draws on subjective factors (stories) as well as objective factors (scores). This integrated approach aims to help ensure the use of multiple data sources to advance triangulation. Second, the approach promotes not only reflection but also metareflection and critical self-reflection. The participants were, in a sense, compelled to go beyond the obvious career interest patterns in isolation and to identify key life themes and discover the link between the patterns and themes. Finally, the environment created by the group served as "an intermediate space or holding environment" (Winnicott, 1965, p. 34) for the development of their career projects that "begin with the space in the group and later occupy a place in the personal/social world relationship—a space for the concretization of career life projects" (p. 34).

The success of the strategy is not surprising. As Rudolph, Lavigne, and Zacher (2017) noted, it would be expected that participants who faced major career choice challenges, such as the transition from school to work, would benefit significantly from such an intervention. The findings confirm those of Patton (2017) and McMahon (2017) regarding the value of career construction approaches for adolescents. The results of the present study also align with a meta-analysis indicating that effective career interventions often comprise an element of general counseling; that a structured group intervention appears more useful than an unstructured group intervention; and that, in general, qualitative group career counseling outcomes are more positive than quantitative outcomes (Whiston, Brecheisen, & Stephens, 2003).

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Because this was a small, limited study using a pretest–posttest design with no control group, the results should be interpreted with caution. Future studies should use a quasi-experimental design with alternative-treatment and no-treatment control groups. Moreover, the volunteer nature of the participants may have had an influence on the outcome. Students motivated to participate may have benefited more from the intervention. Follow-up at regular intervals is needed to examine the longer term usefulness and sustainability of the gains made in the intervention. Replication of the present research with small and large groups of participants in disadvantaged contexts is needed to promote the generalizability of the findings. Use of other quantitative and qualitative instruments could be included in future research. Measuring, for example, sense of self, career identity, and career decidedness of participants could yield interesting results. The development of instruments similar to those used in this study and their implementation in localized and, particularly, in group contexts is essential.

Conclusion

Researchers and policy makers regularly express their support for people who either drop out of school, fail to complete tertiary training, or end up in inappropriate careers. These expressions of concern, however well intended, amount to little unless backed up by active steps to help such people out of their predicaments. Bimrose and Hearne (2012) contended that although there is consensus about the value of quantitative modalities in career intervention (Savickas, 2001), interventions that fail to integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches may be less effective (Blustein, 2006). The present research attempted to address this challenge and offered two forms of support. First, the study supported the effectiveness of an integrated style of career construction counseling. Second, it demonstrated the value of the CAAS-SA as a career counseling instrument for assessing change (and lack thereof) in career adaptability. Future research with the group-based career intervention reported herein is needed to further support its use in diverse contexts.

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